

The Christian

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Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

News-Letter

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DEAR MEMBER,

The editor has asked me to write a News-Letter about the Report of the Commission on the Era of Atomic Power which is now in the hands of the public.

THE THEME

The question to which the Commission attempt to give a provisional answer is: What is the significance for human life and destiny of what happened on August 6th, 1945? When the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima it was everywhere recognized that an event had taken place too stupendous for our mind and imagination to grasp its full meaning. It has been described as an event in human history comparable with the discovery of fire. This is the language not of sensational journalism, but of those who know most about the subject.

The aspect of the new discovery which has been brought home to us by the first use of nuclear energy is the power of self-destruction now at the disposal of mankind. One of the American scientists who took a leading part in atomic research and is a holder of the Nobel prize for his work in nuclear physics says in an article that has been given wide circulation in America that all the scientists he knows are frightened men. The Commission has been able to confirm at first hand that it is those who know most about the matter who take the gravest view of the situation in which mankind now finds itself.

THE COMMISSION

The Commission was made up of six ecclesiastical leaders of the different denominations and eight lay men and women. Four of its members are still in their thirties. All were busy people and anyone who tries to picture their engagement books must be surprised that it was possible to hold three long week-end meetings in a single quarter with a nearly full attendance. There was a remarkable blend of ecclesiastical and lay experience and of old and young. In spite of the diversity of backgrounds there was from the start an ease of communication and quickness of mutual understanding which was very remarkable. The most generous help was also given by between twenty and thirty people, possessing special knowledge

in different fields, who were not members of the Commission, but commented on drafts submitted to them and supplied valuable memoranda. The Supplement in this issue, for example, was in its original form a memorandum submitted to the Commission and is only a small part of what the writer contributed in stimulus and criticism to the thought of the Commission. The help of others was given on a similarly generous scale.

The Commission also had invaluable aid from America. Dr. Richard Fagley of the Federal Council of Churches sent us at once every document on the American side that might be of use to us.

AN EXPERIMENT IN CO-OPERATION

The appointment of the Commission marks a fresh advance in co-operation between the Churches in this country. This is the first occasion on which one of the constituent bodies of the British Council of Churches has, before dealing itself with a large question of national concern, sought the advice of the Council, as was done by the Archbishop of Canterbury when he asked the Council to set up an inter-denominational commission on Atomic Power. It is also the first occasion on which the report of a commission set up jointly by the Churches is being given official consideration by the individual Churches. The Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland has included the Report of the Commission in its own report to the General Assembly meeting this month and supplied 1,600 copies to members of the Assembly. It is expected that similar action will be taken by other Churches.

So long as the Churches remain separate, each Church has a responsibility which it cannot abrogate or devolve on others for giving guidance to its own members on moral and social issues. But it is entirely consistent with the exercise of this individual responsibility by each Church that the Churches should equip themselves for the task by mutual consultation and by joint provision for obtaining the data on which a judgment can be based. A sound precedent has thus been set for the right kind of co-operation between the Churches.

THE HUMAN MIND MUST JUMP

The Commission did not attempt to deal with the methods of international control of atomic power. One has only to look into the question to discover that the possibilities of control depend entirely on technical knowledge, not at present accessible to the general public, and on the realities of the international situation, the main facts of which are also not fully known to the private citizen. Just as our Report was going to press there appeared *The International Control of Atomic Energy*,¹ a report prepared by a committee of

¹ Reprinted by H.M. Stationery Office, 1s.

experts and published by the State Department in America. It is the most encouraging document that has seen the light since the bomb fell on Hiroshima. It presents a convincing case that effective international control is technically possible, if the nations are fully determined that the new discovery shall be used only to serve human welfare and if they address themselves to the task in good faith and mutual confidence. But it is just this confidence that is patently lacking. It would be optimistic to hope that Russian distrust and suspicion can in the near future be sufficiently overcome to secure the adoption of the American proposals. Nor can it be taken for granted that, when it comes to the point, the American nation will be found ready to make the surrender of sovereignty and of its present advantageous position to the extent that the proposed solution demands. Heroic efforts will be needed to translate what is technically possible into political reality.

Our Commission were convinced that to overcome the dangers to which mankind is exposed by the new powers of self-destruction at its disposal more fundamental changes are needed than is ordinarily assumed. So long as present ways of thinking and behaving remain unchanged, it may be that no political arrangements for the international control of atomic power will provide adequate protection; the defences we erect may be swept away by forces which we have left out of our reckoning. A society that can produce and use the atomic bomb needs to examine radically the course it has been pursuing and ask whether that course may not need to be sharply reversed. Does not an event in the physical sphere so stupendous as the release of nuclear energy demand, and may it not be expected to evoke, some corresponding change in the human consciousness?

John Middleton Murry has been insisting that there is no hope of escape from the destruction which threatens us unless the human mind is prepared to *jump*. The theme of Lewis Mumford's last book, written before the atomic bomb but in full awareness where the world under the accelerating advances of science and technology was heading, was that nothing but a complete reorientation of life can save society; a stage has been reached when "conversion must precede every outer change or transformation."

The advantage of the word "jump" is that it conveys the idea of the need for a sudden spring, reaching at a bound a new level of existence. But we should be misled if we took it to mean a leap forward in the direction in which western society has been moving for a long time past. The change that is required is in large part a recovery, the restoration of values that have been largely lost—as Lewis Mumford says, a "conversion."

The Commission maintain that two points can be clearly seen at which this change must take place. One is the subject of the Supplement which follows. We have to offer an unending resistance to the forces making for dehumanization, to re-establish the primacy of the human person and the relations between persons as the ultimate end of all human activities. This is a task to which in an endless variety of ways everyone can contribute and to which each of us can devote himself here and now. "This is something that gets me," wrote one of the critics to whom the draft of the Report was submitted. "I can throw myself into it enthusiastically and let it absorb all my energies."

It is true, as the Supplement insists, that this sensitivity to persons provides in itself no solution of the intractable problems of politics. But it is only in a society in which there is a sufficient supply of this spiritual "humus" that there is any hope of a solution of these problems being found. Just as man has had to wage an age-long fight for survival against the jungle and insect pests and other sub-human forms of life without any individual knowing what the total outcome of the struggle would be, so we have each to do our part in the battle for man's spiritual existence, knowing that our efforts are good in themselves and that this is the true way of life, even though by deserting it men may bring disaster on themselves.

The other necessary change is a recovery of a sense of the transcendent. Only if man is fundamentally related to what is beyond society has he the right and power to resist the absolutism of the totalitarian state. In a striking article in the April number of the *Nineteenth Century*, H. Foster Anderson has shown how the existence side by side of two ultimates, the spiritual and the temporal power, each of which is a finality not resolvable in terms of the other, is one of the foundations of western civilization. Without this duality the whole range of human life is at the mercy of the single ultimate of the all-embracing State. A society can maintain its health only if it has among its members unpurchasable men, and it is the function of religion to create the unpurchasable man.

There reached the Christian News-Letter a week or two ago a copy of a private letter from a young German layman, who writes: "Increasing godlessness is indeed the only explanation of the terrifying indifference towards the importance of every individual human life, which to me is, perhaps, the most horrible of all the dreadful phenomena of our age. Man has been dehumanized because he has emptied his conscience of God and thus lost the tie binding his action to moral considerations. Until a few years ago I used to look upon religion as something which was naturally part of one's *milieu*, of the world one had been brought up in. Now I

have learned to regard it as the one indispensable condition of life and more especially of rebuilding western civilization. This being my conviction it is but natural that I have been looking for some means of giving practical expression to it."

THE RENEWAL OF DEMOCRACY

The keystone which holds the rest of the Report together is the conviction that, if this change of mind is to be effective in saving society from self-destruction, it must find embodiment in political institutions. A second essential characteristic of western civilization, besides the belief in two ultimates already mentioned, has been the belief that matter and the organized life of society are not opposed to spirit, but are the media of its expression. The fundamental problem of society to-day is the restraint of unbridled power, and the Commission believe that the idea of democracy, as it has been worked out in the thought and practice of the British nation, and of its daughter commonwealths, provides the conditions of subjecting power to the control of reason and justice.

Everything turns, of course, on what is meant by "democracy" with its many-sided meanings. One of several stimulating articles, all more or less on the same theme, in a recent issue of the *Student World*, is a paper entitled "The Political Realism of a Christian" by a young Christian Frenchman, who took an active part in the resistance movement. In this he maintains that political realism for the Christian must be pure opportunism, that the Christian wisdom is to be, not democrats or socialists, but the witnesses of God in the world, and that democracy and socialism are but vanities of this world. But he maintains at the same time that the Bible teaches us that certain things are essential—loyalty, in the life of our country, no less than in our personal life; respect for the law as an indispensable means of maintaining a minimum of unity and order in society; and the preservation of the right of everyone to be himself and not to be submerged in the anonymous mass of a totalitarian system. But it is just these essential Christian values that the Commission have in mind when they write about democracy.

The democratic tradition, they believe, still has health in it and the power of life and growth. The urgent task of our time is to re-affirm its essential values and to find new means of expressing them in changing conditions. In the traditional toleration in this country of unpopular opinions, in our instinctive reluctance to coerce minorities, in our recognition of a constitutional opposition, which is "His Majesty's Opposition," we have things of priceless value to mankind, which we need to appreciate afresh and make more articulate both to ourselves and to others.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The Commission suggest that it may be the function of the Church in this crisis to offer to men a creative interpretation of their political activities. If that is to come about, something very far-reaching and remarkable must happen to the Church. Yet in the nature of the crisis there lies the possibility that it may lead us into an understanding of unsuspected depths in the meaning of Christianity.

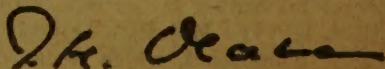
A time may come when the knowledge possessed by scientists will have penetrated, as it has not yet done, into the general consciousness. If that happens, we may witness a widespread undermining of men's confidence in the future, as they become aware of a doom overshadowing civilization. What has Christianity to say in such a situation?

Christianity is a faith—the only faith in the world—that has come to terms with death. Christ overcame death by accepting it, and through acceptance of it taking it up into life and making it a part of life.

Ought not Christians to be people who have had the courage to face the doom that is hanging over civilization and who, by inwardly accepting the possibility, have overcome the fear of it and begun life anew on the other side of the catastrophe? May it be the primary task to which we are called as Christians that we should learn afresh in experience the meaning of death and resurrection, as the fundamental principle of all life? The world can be born anew only as individuals and groups by continually renewed acts “shake off the shackles of old habits, die to their old selves and reach out to a new future.” It is not only to our individual selves that we have to die. We must be ready also to let institutions and activities die, when they have served their purpose, in order that the new forms for which the situation calls may be born. Those who are willing to pass through this experience begin life afresh as on the first day of creation. It is a question whether the world can be saved without passing through the experience of death and resurrection. Is it not precisely here that the Church ought to lead the way?

If you wish to follow out these ideas further, you can obtain the Report—if you act quickly, since paper restrictions permit only a limited edition—for the modest expenditure of two shillings.¹

Yours sincerely,



¹ *The Era of Atomic Power.* Student Christian Movement Press.

GOD AND POLITICS

By GEOFFREY VICKERS

Relationships between individual people are marked in varying degrees by a quality which may be called sensitivity. By this I mean more than a mere understanding by each of the other's point of view ; I mean a more or less conscious sense in each of an underlying fellowship with the other, deeper than the immediate relationship, whatever that be.

SENSITIVITY BETWEEN PERSONS

This sensitivity is conspicuously present in all the relations between members of a well-adjusted family, but there is room for it in all human relations—master and servant, buyer and seller, leader and led, even between opponents in politics, adversaries in war, jailer and prisoner. When it is completely absent—as between Belsen doctors and their human guinea pigs—its absence shocks in a way which would not be possible if such utter absence of fellowship were other than exceptional. Its presence in a very high degree—as between a married pair who have developed an exceptional measure of mutual sympathy—is equally arresting. This quality is of great social importance, indeed it is the essential element of coherence in human societies, and its growth is encouraged or discouraged by social conditions. It tends to grow among mates in a work gang, as well as among neighbours in a village ; even between the delegates at a long-drawn conference. It is discouraged by all the influences which atomize society. In relatively stable societies it accumulates from generation to generation. It tends to operate within sharply drawn boundaries, which often seem arbitrary, its high sense of fellowship within the boundary being often balanced by an equally marked absence of this sense towards all outside the pale. It is thus one of the most important as well as the most obscure of the facts with which sociology is concerned.

It is also a quality of great moral importance. The individual who goes out to meet his fellows in this spirit enlarges and deepens his own personality and theirs. It is thus an essential factor in integrating the personality ; and it may be the result of a deliberate moral effort, a by-product of the spiritual labour by which a man breaks open the windows of his own soul, gives up the delusive safety of his own self-containedness, blows out his own lantern so as to see the stars.

BEYOND AND WITHIN HISTORY

Viewed thus as a by-product of spiritual achievement, the task of infusing sensitivity into personal relations is outside history, in that it is the same in any age past or future. Viewed as a product of social development it is within history, in that the actual situation at any given point of time determines within very narrow limits how much sensitivity there shall be. Do men live in walled villages and keep watch at night? Or do they sleep in scattered farmsteads with their doors unlocked? Do they shift from doss house to doss house as they hunt for work? Do they live, as "mobile workers" in a railway train, and spend their holidays in whatever category of hotel their performance entitles them to? Or do they live and die within the secure limitations of a stabilized society? Factors such as these will largely determine, at each point of history, how each will regard his fellows and whom each will regard as his fellows.

It is difficult to relate these two aspects of relatedness—the sociological and the spiritual—but they are not inconsistent. It is necessary first to believe that the fellowship is real, and that the individual not only can recognize it but must recognize it in order to live a life worth living. It is necessary, in fact, to believe that the "moral initiative" will go on springing up in the individual soul throughout the ages, because it is the inevitable reaction to a fact about the nature of things which is true and which is continually forcing its way into consciousness. This, I think, is what Christians describe as the love of God working in the world through men, describing thus a force which is not a human attribute but an aspect of the reality of which man is part, and which he can deny only at the cost of denying himself.

Pouring thus into the world with timeless freshness through every individual in so far as he is permeable by it, this force works continually on the changing historical situation, and is one of the forces which changes it; but it does not gain control of it, and there is no reason to hope that it ever will. Some situations are more favourable than others. If you happen to have lived in Ireland in the 1920's or Germany in the 1930's, you are rather more unlucky than most; but wherever you live, the relations between individuals which are given by the social conditions of the time and place cannot be made *wholly* sensitive in a moment or at all. The spiritual insight and impulse which breaks into history through individuals may transform the individuals whom it possesses completely and in a moment. It can affect society and history only partially and slowly.

Yet there is an important mutual relationship between this force which is for ever breaking through from outside history, and the development which is for ever going on in history. The individual's moral initiative can mould the social heritage, affect social and political institutions and so take root in time; and conversely, the social habits and institutions thus moulded create a more favourable climate in which future moral initiatives may germinate. The moral initiative of Jesus Christ created first his own personality, and next the personality of all those down the ages who have taken fire from him; but it also entered into history and by creating one continuing social institution, namely the Church, and affecting others, set in train historical developments which have, on the whole, created a far more congenial climate for the growth of "sensitive" relationships.

THE COLLECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS OF POLITICS

So far we have been considering primarily individual human relationships. There is, however, a far more baffling field, namely the field of collective relationships which is the material of politics. At first sight these relations between communities and even between Governments and governed seem to defy "sensitizing." The Good Samaritan, tending the wounded man on the road to Jericho, had scope and need for his "sensitivity." But what need, what scope for "sensitivity" has the chief of police in Jerusalem to-day, planning to raid a village at dawn to-morrow to round up some murderers, and to search for arms? Or devising a way to get evidence against those who were rounded up yesterday? Is he not an exploiter of men, one who deals with some men as things? And even if thereby other men are freed from fear and enabled more easily to live together as persons, is he justified? In any case, this is not his object or motive. He is doing the job he is paid for and carrying out his orders. Again, what relevance has talk about "sensitive relations between persons" to a dispute between Britain, America and Russia about their relative positions in Persia?

In the first place let us recognize that even relations between nations are not wholly immoral. It is, for example, very hard to imagine circumstances in which the course of history between Britain and America, over two years, could parallel that between Germany and Russia over the two years from August 1939 to August 1941. Similarly, though British justice in Palestine at a time of incipient civil war may be different from British justice in Britain, it is no less different from the justice of the Gestapo.

None the less, political relationships differ from personal relationships. Even personal relationships as they actually present themselves are not capable of being wholly transformed by spiritual insight. (Even Jesus Christ seems to have had little sympathy to spare for Pharisees.) But the collective relations with which politics deal seem to be almost wholly immune from direct influence by the spiritual insight of men, whilst men's spiritual insight seems to be often bedevilled by dealing with politics. It is natural that some should regard the two as incompatible and should withdraw into a world where decisions are limited to the field of personal relationships with persons or of pure introspection.

But the decision is neither right nor even logical. A man is condemned by his nature to be in history yet tormented by being not wholly of it. As a sailing ship is driven through the dense, intractable medium of the sea by the infinitely lively and elastic air, moved only by the one but able to move only in the other, and so unable to escape their unending conflict except by ceasing to be itself—so a man cannot escape from history even in a monastery, still less in Hollywood. Politics is only the extreme case of an inescapable human condition. We have seen that the "moral initiative" which breaks out from an individual man affects the world in two ways—directly, as it bears on other individual men; indirectly, as it modifies the social heritage, and so passes into history to stimulate and condition the unborn. Collective relationships are moulded only indirectly, through the social heritage. The inspector of police in Jerusalem may be a saint in himself and an inspiration to his men. To those whom he rounds up he will probably be no more than a rat-catcher is to a rat. Yet he will not be without influence on collective relationships. His influence on the administration of justice will not eliminate to-day's bitterness; but because of it, a bitterness which might otherwise have darkened history years hence will be that much less. And nobody will know.

This is no small reward. For first, the politician is also a man in a world of men, and what he is has no less influence on his fellow-men than if he were not a politician. His contribution through politics, however indirect, is something over and above what other men can do. Furthermore it may be vastly important. I do not know anything about the private life of Lord Durham, but however great the significance of his life on his contemporaries, I wonder if it was as great as the indirect effect of his political wisdom on the spiritual climate of Canada and hence on millions of individual Canadians. No one can possibly tell; nor does it matter, so long as it is clear that there is a chance, however remote, that political labour may indirectly prepare a seed bed for the sowing of the Spirit.

THE FLUX OF HISTORY AND THE LOVE OF GOD

If this analysis be right, the position is as follows. The power which Christians call the love of God is capable of transforming the personalities of those who surrender themselves to it, giving them an insight, an energy and a "wholeness" which they cannot otherwise have. This it has always had power to do, and there is no reason to expect that the achievements or the difficulties of saints in the future will be greater or less than those of saints in the past, though there may be more or fewer of them. Thus the power of the love of God to operate on men and through men is not a fact of history but a fact outside history, affected by history only in that the situation at any given time and place may be more or less favourable to the making of this initial act of surrender by individual men.

This power, once loose in the world through a man, operates both directly on his individual fellowmen and indirectly on the social heritage, by which future human persons and human relations are influenced. It deposits in history a sort of spiritual humus to be the seed bed of the future ; but the sowing must always be done anew.

Group relations which are the material of politics are beyond, or almost beyond, direct influence by the power of the Spirit in men ; but they may be powerfully influenced indirectly, at a second remove, through the modification which it can work in the social heritage.

The power of the Spirit is not the only or the most obvious influence on the social heritage. The interplay of events which is history is such as to present a continually changing situation, always more or less intractable. A change such as the industrial revolution, the unintended result of scientific achievements noble in themselves, scatters the social heritage of centuries. Spiritual insights and energies can help to gather it again, but they cannot foresee and avert the initial calamity. The stream of events cannot be turned off or canalized or tamed. It will forever present new challenges calling for new responses. And the new response will always have to come from outside through individual persons.

And yet the relation between the flux of history and the love of God is not just that of the wind lashing the sea. Mysteriously linked in time, the age-long procession of human beings carries along with it their various heritages, as in a broad river streaks of different colours may mark the waters of tributaries which flow united but still unmixed. These heritages, like the humus in a wood, are the detritus of old flowerings and the seed bed of future sowings. They are the

link between the historical and the eternal. Because of them, a man can no more turn away from history than from God, however great the agonies and inconsistencies of living in both. The Kingdom of Heaven can never be built in history; but it is by wrestling with history that the Kingdom of Heaven is built.

What guidance does this give in practical politics? Was it right or wrong to drop an atom bomb on Hiroshima? Would it have been more right or more wrong had we evolved the weapon five years before, to have dropped one on Berlin at the crux of the Battle of Britain? There are, I think, no conclusive answers to these questions—only an answer of the unsatisfactory kind, which hybrid humans imprisoned in history must do their best with. It runs somewhat as follows: "In any actual political situation there is bound to be an element, great or small, of coercion; and those in authority are bound to be its agents. In so far as they are also agents of the Spirit from outside history, they will be tormented by insights which they will be unable adequately to realize in action. Their torment is the safeguard of the present, and the hope of the future. Anything may conceivably become the least bad course of action in some circumstances. But if those who make the decisions are servants of the Spirit, they will bring to flower whatever that age is fit to bear, and will leave behind them a seed bed as good as that age is fit to leave. More than that they should not expect of themselves or we of them."

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